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Request
20032-38.1351

Congress of the United States

Committee on International Relations

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

March 27, 1978

JOHN J. BRADY, JR.
CHIEF OF STAFF

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[Redacted]
Acting Legislative Counsel
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

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Dear [Redacted]

The House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs is requesting the Central Intelligence Agency's comment on the enclosed letter.

We have already informally contacted [Redacted] National Intelligence Officer for Asia, and would appreciate your forwarding the enclosed to him for evaluation.

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Thank you.

Sincerely,

E. J. Palmer
Edward J. Palmer
Staff Director
Subcommittee on Asian and
Pacific Affairs

jpa

On file OSD release instructions apply.

Enclosure

cc: Hon. Lester L. Wolff, Chairman
Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs

James J. Przysup, Staff Associate

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21 February 1978

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Honolulu HI 96816

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The Honorable Lester Wolff
Chairman, Sub-Committee on Asian and Pacific Affairs
International Relations Committee
2463 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D. C. 20515

Subject: United States Military Personnel Still Being Held
Prisoner in Laos

Dear Congressman Wolff:

Information available to me from human sources controlled while on active military duty as a United States Air Force (USAF) air intelligence officer and information developed as a private citizen after retiring from active military duty cause me to conclude there are an unknown number, probably in excess of one hundred (100) United States (U.S.) military personnel being held prisoner (POW) within the geographical boundaries of the country of Laos.

My knowledge of U. S. involvement in Laos and development of personal knowledge of Laos and Laotians began in July, 1964 when ordered there as a support member of the U. S. Air Attache staff under Colonel Robert L. F. Tyrrell. My specific duties were to function as personal advisor to Brigadier General Thao Ma, Commander of the Royal Lao Air Force, and induce him to respond to the desires of the U. S. Government (Govt.) as determined by the U. S. military command in Southeast Asia and the U. S. Ambassador to Laos and then levied on the U. S. Air Attache.

Upon leaving that assignment in August, 1966 there was an assignment to Detachment 5, 6499th Special Activities Group in Bangkok, Thailand. This unit was committed to collection of foreign positive intelligence information gained through human sources. After one year there and a three-year assignment to the Defense Intelligence Agency in related work there was a return to the Bangkok unit as its operations officer. One of our principal concerns was development of agent networks in Laos. Of particular interest was collection of information about U. S. POWs being held captive in Laos. We were only marginally successful in this effort. However, that information collected established beyond any reasonable doubt

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U.S. POWs in Laos

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that U. S. POWs were being held captive by Pathet Lao forces as distinguished from North Vietnamese forces, that they were being kept alive, that they were being held in unorthodox prison facilities controlled by a system totally unknown to Western minds, and that there were relatively large numbers of POWs alive then.

Partially because of a growing feeling of frustration over other U. S. agencies lending only token support to this USAF intelligence collection effort while covertly placing near-insurmountable obstacles between the USAF and its carrying out its assigned intelligence responsibilities in Laos, my retirement from active duty took place in July, 1974.

Thereupon followed a return to Thailand and a private effort to obtain either information about these POWs or the POWs themselves.

My problem, as defined by myself, was to analyze the Pathet Lao Government structure, identify positions whose incumbents would probably have knowledge of U. S. POWs, identify the incumbent office holders, develop avenues of access to these persons, assess them as individuals, determine which persons might be amenable to recruitment, recruit them, and task them to provide information relative to U. S. POWs and hopefully to result in release, through purchase, of as many POWs as possible. Throughout this there had to be assurance that the Pathet Lao would be led to believe there was absolutely no U. S. Govt. involvement as their emotional attitude at the time prevented any government-to-government discussion on this subject.

Disregarding details how it was done, access to a high-level Pathet Lao leader was developed. Without his knowing of any American involvement or backing of his questioner, he revealed that he personally had under his control some 30-60 U. S. POWs whose existence was not known to North Vietnamese forces. He had them hidden in a number of locations and guarded by persons loyal to him as an individual. Negotiations with this man were started through intermediaries known to and trusted by him. Unfortunately, the events of April-May 1975 (17 April: loss of Cambodia, 30 April: loss of South Vietnam, 11 May: Laos became communist) brought these efforts to a standstill.

Because of the obstacles one faces in trying to penetrate a closed communist country such as Laos, lack of personal funds to continue my efforts, other personal reasons, and indications that my efforts were known to certain U. S. agencies who suggested that successful efforts on my part would be counter to U. S. foreign policy, there has been a temporary retreat by me from aggressive pursuit of my original goals.

Turning to the legislative branch of our government with this information appears to be the only viable way of getting other elements of our government to address the problem. At the urging of Mrs. Ann Griffiths, National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, and as understood by me, the

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tacit concurrence of your colleague, the Honorable Benjamin Gilman, this letter has been prepared and forwarded to you for your consideration.

There are countless other details on this subject known to me and which could be shared with you if that should be of value to you in pursuit of this subject.

To the best of my knowledge, based upon my intimate understanding of Laotian cultural standards and Laotians as people, and my professional and private efforts to recover U. S. POWs from Pathet Lao forces, it is my opinion that there are numerous U. S. military personnel alive and being held prisoner in Laos today.

I urge you to use your office and committee positions to explore this subject and initiate action to recover these American men from their unwarranted fate as prisoners in Laos. It can be done.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of my information.

Respectfully yours,

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[redacted signature block]

cc: Congressman Benjamin Gilman
Mrs. Ann Griffiths
National League of Families of
American Prisoners and Missing
in Southeast Asia